If You Give a Reader a Cookie:

How to Design an Irresistible Reader Magnet

Tammi Labrecque,
Newsletter Ninja

The Ideal Reader Magnet*

… is a complete story.	… is tightly aligned with your catalog	… can be enjoyed by new readers
• not a sample • not supplementary materials • not a deleted scene • not a flipped POV scene • not an epilogue • does not have to be a complete novel	• beloved characters • unanswered questions • illuminates character • fleshes out the world • but should not advance story or development beyond the series books	• doesn't require previous knowledge • spoiler-free • just enough world building or back story to keep oriented • opens loop(s) that drive to the series • but no cliffhangers

*convertible

Arcs, Events & Worldbuilding

This isn't your dad's Hero's Journey.

01

SOME COOKIES HAVE TRADITIONAL STORY ARCS

- prequel, side quests, spinoffs
- beginning, middle, end
- traditional structure(s) - dependent on genre

02

BUT SOME STORIES ARE MORE LIKE EVENTS

- a meeting or a memory
- the first case/mystery
- a single day when everything changed

03

AND SOME STORIES EXIST MOSTLY FOR WORLD BUILDING

- epic fantasy prologue
- UF or spec fic love a villain story or other MC story
- myths, folk tales, or histories

Significance, Size, & Stakes

"Short" doesn't have to mean "small."

01

IN WHAT WAY IS YOUR STORY SIGNIFICANT?

- import
- gravity
- noteworthy

02

HOW BIG (OR SMALL) IS YOUR STORY?

- a world or a room
- a species or a handful of people
- a milennium or a minute

03

WHAT'S AT STAKE IN YOUR STORY?

- urgency
- risk
- consequences

Essentials & the Art of Subtraction

What must your story have, and what can you leave out?

01

WHAT DO READERS EXPECT?

- tropes/conventions
- tone/style
- **your** readers have expectations of **you** as well

02

WHAT CAN YOU SAFELY REMOVE?

- anything that's repeated
- anything that's not holding up the framework
- probably much more than you think

03

SUBTRACTION WORKS <u>BECAUSE</u> OF THE EXPECTATIONS

- readers already know the shape of these stories
- they can make more leaps than you might think
- it's good to get beta feedback on this, though

Characters & Settings

Every character has to earn their place. So does every place.

01

WHAT CHARACTERS MAKE THE CUT?

- fan favorites
- characters that advance the story
- combine walk-ons anywhere you can

02

- HOW MANY SETTINGS DO YOU REALLY NEED?
- again, a fan favorite
- places where essential action happens
- combine settings where you can

03

THESE THINGS INFLATE WORD COUNT

- description (of people or places)
- travel (from one place to another)
- explanations (how someone or something fits in the story)

Relevancy & "Fan Service"

Give 'em what they want, what they really really want.

01

HOW DOES THE STORY ALIGN WITH YOUR CATALOG?

- cameos from main characters
- filling in blanks (but not story-advancing ones)
- fan favorites

02

HEY EDGELORDS, FAN SERVICE IS GOOD

- readers like things, and it tends to be contagious
- there's nothing cool about refusing to give it to them
- "fan service" literally means making readers happy. DO THAT.

03

MAKE IT GO BOTH WAYS

- catalog fan favorites start in cookies
- the side characters in cookies are the MCs of the catalog books
- new readers funnel in, your readers get more of what they love

Economy & Efficiency

Spend words wisely and make sure every word has a job to do.

01

WRITING SHORT MEANS CUTTING ON THE WORD LEVEL

- articles
- tick words (that!)
- compound verbs

02

BE STINGY WITH WORDS

- do you need to describe that?
- let dialogue stand alone
- assume readers can make leaps

03

MAKE WORDS WORK HARD

- don't use two words when one better word will do
- make a word evocative of setting or character (world-building)
- dialogue especially can do double duty

THANK YOU!

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